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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

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Property Address: **1612-1616 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW**  
Landmark/District: **Shaw Historic District**  
ANC: **6E**

Meeting Date: **June 23, 2016**  
H.P.A. Number: **#16-262**  
Staff Reviewer: **Brendan Meyer**

☒ Agenda  
☐ Consent Calendar  
☐ Denial Calendar  
☒ Concept Review  
☒ Alteration  
☐ New Construction  
☐ Demolition  
☐ Subdivision  
☐ Archaeology

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Owner Richard Grudsky seeks conceptual review for a four-story rear and partial rooftop addition atop at 1612-1616 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW, three two-story buildings which contribute to the character of the Shaw Historic District. Plans were prepared by PGN Architects PLLC.



1 PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE RENDERING  
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

1612-1616 7TH ST. N.W.

1612-1616 7th St. N.W.  
Washington D.C.  
Square: 420 Lot No: 38 Zone: C-2-A

PGN  
PGN Architects, PLLC  
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Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 462-0000 (F) (202) 462-0008

PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE RENDERING

A-31

04/18/2016

### Property Description and Context

The site is in the far northeast corner of the historic district, just below Rhode Island Avenue. The blocks of 7<sup>th</sup> Street below Q Street are outside the historic district and not subject to Board review. The block of 7<sup>th</sup> Street across from the site is also outside the historic district but includes two designated landmark buildings; Shaw Junior High School and The Lafayette apartment building.

The three subject buildings were built as a group some time before 1874 based on tax surveyor records. The first floor storefronts are not original. The second floor facades are largely intact and

exhibit historic materials and craftsmanship, including: cast iron window hoods with pendants and a wood cornice of brackets, modillions and arched spandrels. The awning-like features above the second floor windows are not original. The rear of the group is a conglomeration of small additions that have transformed the once recognizable rear wings and dog leg courts into a dense group of one and two story additions nearly reaching 100% lot coverage.

As two-story buildings, the group fits neatly into the overall row of historic buildings on this block of 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The whole row of two and three story buildings are typical of the historic commercial buildings in the Shaw Historic District along 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets that have commercial ground floors and residential upper floors. As streetscapes, while retail storefronts were frequently updated by changing architectural tastes, the materials, ornament and dimensions of the upper stories remain largely unchanged and fundamentally define the scale and character of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century historic district.

### **Proposal**

The proposal calls for demolishing the rear wings and their multiple additions and retain the main block of the buildings to a depth of 35 feet from the front façade. The floor systems and load bearing walls will be retained except for the original rear walls. The second and third floor of the addition would be the full width of the property at the front, but immediately behind that set back five feet from each side property line to affect a sort of T-shaped floor plan. The third floor would be set back 25 feet from the front façade resulting in 14 feet of it resting on top of the back of the historic buildings. This floor includes walk-out access on the front to a roof deck that would come to within 6 feet of the historic facades. A fourth floor would step back from the third story 16 feet at the front and at a 1:1 ratio on all other sides.

The front façade of the new third floor would be clad in painted brick to match the historic second floor façade below, and the fenestration of the addition would align with the historic openings. The fourth floor would transition to a contemporary arrangement of metal and glass panels on all sides. The rear elevations of the addition would be at the rear property line and repeat the materials of its front.

The historic facades would be renovated by removing non-historic elements including the ground floor storefronts and contraptions over the second floor windows. A series of three matching storefronts would be constructed with each consisting of a projecting show window two bays wide and an entrance to the south. Above the flat roofs of the show windows, a horizontal line of transoms and cornice would run across the facades and align with the openings below.

### **Evaluation**

Adding on top of small historic buildings in a compatible manner has two fundamental challenges: how to avoid excessive demolition of the historic buildings below and how to add additional stories when the height and scale of the historic buildings is an important contribution to the character of the historic district. As a general rule, a rooftop addition that is set back off the top of the main block of a historic building will successfully address both of these challenges by reducing the amount of demolition and hiding the addition from primary views. The more a rooftop addition extends on to the top of the main block, the more potential it has to be visible or result in excessive demolition. These assessments need to be calibrated against the context of the neighborhood in which the addition would sit. If the context has a high degree of historic integrity, additions that might produce a conspicuous change should be reviewed guardedly, but if the historic integrity of the district has eroded in this area, the addition might fit into its surroundings without noticeably disturbing the historic district further.

In this case, the streetscape, heights and cornice lines at the front of the historic row, and the building heights and massings of the interior of the square have a high degree of integrity. While the amount of demolition is kept at a sufficient minimum, the addition would be prominently visible and fundamentally change the size and scale of the streetscape in an incompatible way.

As shown in perspective rendering (page A-31), the third floor would be visible from directly across the street and alter the perceived height and profile of a large portion the block. A 3-D animation shows that the fourth floor would also be visible for much of the block to the south. While the third floor elevation is designed with materials and a rhythm borrowed from below, this is little redress for an addition that is simply too big and visible for such a modest sized row of buildings. In another context where an isolated group of historic building is surrounded by a back-drop of taller buildings—like in the Downtown or Fourteenth Street historic districts—some visible height of sufficient setback can be accommodated without changing the character of the historic district. But in this case, where the new addition would change the profile of the row and how it meets the sky, the change in character in terms of size and scale would be significant.

To a lesser extent but considerable in its own right, the height of the third story at the alley—37 feet—would introduce a new and prominent massing to the interior of the square where building heights are historic and generally 22 feet high. That is not to say the addition cannot be taller than the rowhouses, but to predict that a tall addition like this--the first of its kind on the square--could inspire other properties to propose similar sized additions.

The renovation of the front facade and the reconstruction of historic storefronts is a strong component of the concept.

Largely due to the small scale of the row, and the existing sightlines of the area, an addition that sets back fully off of the top of the historic buildings and did not include a fourth floor would avoid many of the incompatibilities of the current proposal. A reduction in the program of the proposal would facilitate the design process for this option.

**Recommendation**

*The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept of adding a third or fourth floor that would be visible from the 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW right-of-way to be incompatible with the character of this property and the historic district and advise the applicant to reduce the addition such that it will not be visible from the 7<sup>th</sup> Street NW right-of-way and return to the Board for further review.*